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# For the Freedom of Her Race: Black Women and Electoral Politics in Illinois, 1877–1932

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ers themselves sometimes resisted safety administration. Organized labor, however, largely supported the measures, yet it was a change in the thrust of the labor movement that eventually helped to undermine the state-based system of regulation. The political retrenchment of the 1920s stalled the expansion of health and safety programs, but it was the Great Depression and the turn to collective bargaining that marked the turn away from non-federal regulation. As to the effectiveness of all of this for actual health and safety, including occupational diseases such as silicosis, Rogers is uncertain. Government activity occurred, but declining death, injury, and disease rates could have come from changes in industrial practice. As a result, the coming of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration in 1975 serves as a coda to the book and to the larger story as well.

In general, the book is well done, if somewhat narrowly focused. More attention might have been paid to the lives of actual workers, the activities of progressive organizations, or changes in medicine. The attention to other states is beneficial, but the story is still largely centered on Wisconsin, without much direct investigation of the social, political, or economic contexts of the other states. For instance, how might working conditions in a Jim Crow state such as Alabama have differed? Such questions suggest areas for further research, especially in states such as Iowa that were not as heavily industrialized as some others. Anyone undertaking such inquiries will want to start with Rogers's account.

*For the Freedom of Her Race: Black Women and Electoral Politics in Illinois, 1877–1932,* by Lisa G. Materson. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009. xv, 344 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. $42.00 cloth.

Reviewer Virginia R. Boynton is professor of history at Western Illinois University. Her research and publications have focused on women's involvement in Illinois's government-sponsored war effort during World War I.

African American history during the Jim Crow era has received considerable scholarly attention in recent years, as has the history of women during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. In this important new study, historian Lisa Materson joins these two fields, while simultaneously contributing to the historiography on political culture in modern America and on Illinois and the Midwest. Drawing on a wide range of manuscript sources, government documents, newspapers and periodicals, and published primary and secondary sources, the author documents the impact of black women who migrated to Illinois

(primarily Chicago) on state and national politics, especially through the Republican Party. She demonstrates that as voters, campaigners, and lobbyists black women supported candidates and elected officials who kept alive the effort to enforce civil rights for African Americans in the United States. More broadly, these women made a significant contribution to promoting the GOP ideology that federal power should be used to protect the citizenship rights of African Americans, in the South as well as the North.

Starting with the first statewide election in Illinois in which women were allowed to vote — the 1894 election of University of Illinois Board of Trustee members (the 1891 Woman Suffrage Bill legalized women's voting for school-related offices in Illinois) — and continuing through multiple political battles at the local, state, and national levels until the early New Deal, Materson traces the pivotal roles played by some of the state's black female activists, including Ella Berry, Jennie Lawrence, Irene Goins, and Irene McCoy Gaines, in GOP politics. The author illuminates the myriad ways black women organized support for the nomination and election of sympathetic candidates — most of them white, many of them women — for local, state, and national positions. While often disappointed with the subsequent actions (or inaction) of some of these elected representatives, these politically active — and politically savvy — black GOP women continued to seek out and support those who offered the best chance of garnering government support for at least some part of their cause. White Republicans such as Ruth Hanna McCormick, elected to Congress in 1928 in large part because of the efforts of the Colored Women's Republican Clubs of Illinois (CWRCI), did not always come through for their black supporters, but did at times provide strong support for important causes, including the struggle against lynching.

Materson's analysis of black GOP women's involvement in the anti-lynching campaign is one of the strengths of this study. Her analysis of their roles in this legislative campaign is comprehensive. Working through local women's clubs affiliated with the National Association of Colored Women, Illinois's black women successfully pressured their state's congressional representatives to support the anti-lynching bill introduced by Missouri GOP Congressman Leonidas Dyer. The U.S. House of Representatives, with support from Illinois congressmen, passed the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill in 1922, before that year's congressional mid-term elections. However, the Dyer Bill was threatened with a filibuster by the Democratic minority in the U.S. Senate, and the Republican leadership withdrew it from Senate consideration once the 1922 mid-term elections were over. Materson traces the im-

pact that this loss had on the black Republican women of Illinois, who subsequently determined that because their efforts to get as many newly enfranchised women to the polls as possible in 1920 and 1922 elections did not lead to policy change in the federal government's commitment to protect black citizens' rights, they needed to establish a formal organization dedicated solely to that purpose. Consequently, the CWRCI was established in 1924 and remained active and influential in Illinois GOP politics throughout the next decade.

In her conclusion, Materson highlights the irony of the experience of black GOP women in Illinois; she notes that "just as they had built up effective Republican organizations, forces beyond their control drew black voters toward the Democratic Party" (239) in the early years of the New Deal response to the Great Depression. Nonetheless, as the author argues, black Republican women played a crucial role in keeping alive within their party during these decades a commitment to black civil rights during the turn-of-the-century nadir in American race relations.

*The Man Who Wrecked 146 Locomotives: The Story of "Head-On Joe" Connolly*, by James J. Reisdorff. David City, NE: South Platte Press, 2009. 48 pp. Illustrations, bibliography. $19.95 paper.

> Reviewer Chris Rasmussen is associate professor of history at Fairleigh Dickinson University. In "Progress and Catastrophe: Public History at the Iowa State Fair, 1854–1946" (*Annals of Iowa,* 2004), he wrote about staged train wrecks and other staged catastrophes at the Iowa State Fair.

In 1896 tens of thousands of spectators paid to gape as two 60-ton locomotives collided head-on in front of the grandstand at the Iowa State Fair. The engines' earth-shaking collision launched the singular career of Joseph S. Connolly, who staged 73 train wrecks at fairgrounds across the nation between 1896 and 1932. James J. Reisdorff has done a remarkable job of tracing Connolly's exploits, from his small-town Iowa boyhood to his final train wreck at the 1932 Iowa State Fair. Reisdorff has unearthed hard-to-find accounts of Connolly's staged train wrecks, and his book contains dozens of photographs, sketches, and advertisements depicting these destructive spectacles.

Reisdorff's book is not merely a collection of historical curiosities, but attempts to explain the psychological and social factors that made staged train wrecks so popular. "Head-On Joe" Connolly probably never read Sigmund Freud's theory of psychoanalysis, but he intuitively understood his audience, observing that "somewhere in the makeup of every normal person there lurks the suppressed desire to smash things up" (9).